

February 13, 2006
Marietta Daily Journal Staff Writer

CCT converts to MARTA Breeze card
Amanda Casciaro -staff

MARIETTA - Transferring from Atlanta's transit system to Cobb Community Transit used to mean extra change in addition to finding the right route.

Now, officials say, it's a breeze.

After months of converting data and negotiating with the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, CCT officials announced Monday riders can transfer buses by simply swiping a card instead of digging for extra change.

Customers load money onto the Breeze card, much like a debit card, and each system takes their respective fares out of the account with every swipe.

"Our staff and MARTA staff worked very hard on this project and I am extremely pleased that the conversion was so successful," said Cobb CCT Division Manager Rebecca Gutowsky. "MARTA has been an outstanding partner in this project and I look forward to future regional partnerships."

According to MARTA officials, the automatic fare collection system will eventually be integrated into all regional transit systems including Gwinnett County Transit, C-Tran and Xpress.

The move to MARTA's Breeze card system marks the second significant partnership with the Atlanta system in recent months.

In November, Cobb commissioners approved a one-year pilot program with MARTA allowing each system to pick up passengers on a one-mile stretch just inside both counties on Cobb Parkway near the IBM complex.

The move trumped a longstanding "closed-door" policy that permitted transit systems to drop passengers off outside their jurisdictions, but not pick up.

The partnership was in response to employees and other residents near the IBM complex that elected to walk 1.5 miles into Cobb County to catch a bus at the Cumberland Transfer Station instead of riding 16 miles round trip to Atlanta just to come back into Cobb.

"I don't want to get into a long-term relationship that we're not ready to get into," Commissioner Joe Lee Thompson said in November. "This is a simple agreement between MARTA and Cobb County, and I'd like to keep it that way."

The new route, which affected six stops inbound and outbound, marked MARTA's second entrance into Cobb. A shuttle bus on Six Flags Drive began in the 1980s.

Officials maintain the recent partnerships with Atlanta's transit system, which was denied entrance into Cobb in the 1960s, is not indicative of a merger.

"There are no discussions between CCT and MARTA with regard to a merger," said Cobb Commission Chairman Sam Olens. "There are certainly discussions to where we can enhance the service and reduce the cost. - This is just a sign of the elected leadership in the region showing some maturity.

"When there are ways in which we can reduce the cost and increase the services, we should be doing them."

CCT and MARTA officials maintain the move is just another measure to ease transition for riders.

"MARTA and CCT's work together on the Breeze system integration has been one of the most successful smart card collaborations in the entire nation," said Neil Poling, director of Technical Enterprises Planning and Management. "The Breeze technology provides a great opportunity to coordinate transportation solutions with our regional partners and we are extremely pleased that CCT was the first agency to join us in this endeavor."

MARTA is offering free Breeze cards for a limited time at www.breezecard.com. Call CCT customer service at (770) 427-4444 for more information.

acasciaro@mdjonline.com